

Stubborn Submission

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- [0 : 0 0] I don't remember when I told you this story last, but I'm sure that I've told it to you because it's one of my favorite stories, or one that always comes to my mind.
- And it has to do, it's a story written, I think it's called a parable actually, I think it's written by Tolstoy. I think it's one of those Russians, I never can get them all quite sorted out, but I think it was Tolstoy.
- And he told the story of a woodsman that was working away in the deep forests of Russia and cutting his daily quota of cordwood.
- And the day was just about done and the sun was beginning to go down and he packed away his saw and axe and went out to the road and started to trudge homeward.
- When no other and no less a person than the king himself came along that very road in a sleigh with a single horse pulling it, and he stopped and offered the forester a ride.
- [1 : 1 5] And the forester was very grateful after his long day and they headed down the forest road and not too far ahead was a clearing.
- And in the clearing were a great many people. And the forester said to his host, whom he didn't recognize at all, he said, I wonder who those people are.
- And his host said to him, I think they have gathered there because the king is coming. And so the forester was very excited to think he would be there and he would see the king.
- So he said to his host, how will we tell who the king is? And he said, well, when the king gets there, everybody will take off his hat except the king.
- So the king will be the one who still has his hat on. So they drove into the clearing and sure enough, everybody took off their hat and cheered madly.
- [2 : 3 0] And the only two people left with their hats on were the forester and the king. And he was left with the problem of wondering which one of them was the king.
- Well, that's, I always, I like that story anyway. The, there was in the sun on the weekend, which you may have seen, that review of a book by a young man.
- I don't know if he's from Vancouver or not, but, which is called Life Before God. And it's a, it's an intriguing sounding book.
- And the review is intriguing because the theme of the story is, apparently this fellow has written a book called Generation X.
- And now this book is about the first generation that has been brought up in North America without God. They have, that's just not part of their education, not part of their culture, not part of their background, not part of their learning or their experience at all.
- [3 : 5 3] So that, you know, that this is the generation with their hats still on, wondering who the king is and unable to make that kind of decision.
- Well, that's, that's, this is all introductory to the passage that you have in front of you. And that has been read. Another part of the introduction is this clipping from the Globe and Mail yesterday about being a victim.

I don't know if you read it, but it's, it's a, this is one paragraph out of it, you see, that talks about it, or two paragraphs. The Menendez brothers in California, killers of their parents, make vague but theatrical claims of abuse, and their case ends in a double mistrial.

The Bobbitts go to court. He's acquitted. He's acquitted. And a series of killers, a serial killer, throws himself on the mercy of the court in Florida.

Yes, he killed five students, raping several, and arranging the severed head of one tastefully on a bookshelf. But his father had abused him, and angels and demons tormented him.

[5 : 17] Then it says, two blacks bashed in the head of a white truck driver with a brick, danced a little jig of joy, and are acquitted, because they, they have been unreasonably provoked by the court verdict in the Rodney King case.

And then the writer says, it will not be long at this rate before the mandatory sentence for a crime of violence is a hug and a good cry.

Well, part of the thinking behind that is, of course, that human beings, such as you and me, are in fact, kind of, you're a piece of machinery, and the fine tuning has got out of adjustment.

And so, when you are given a hate in your heart, and have a machine gun in your hand, how you behave is the result of the fact that as a piece of machinery, somebody has forgotten to adjust you the way you should have been adjusted.

Your parents haven't done it. Your environment hasn't done it. Your neighbors haven't done it. And so, you are the victim of your own violence, and you go out and murder people with your machine gun.

[6 : 46] And that what is happening now in our society is that once we recognize that people basically, if the tuning is done right, if the machine is working right, people will behave themselves.

And if people don't behave themselves, then some steps have to be taken to adjust the machinery so that in future they will. And, of course, that is the scientific process of being able to penetrate the will and the heart and the mind of human beings and make those necessary adjustments so that everybody will behave.

And this idea that when we do things we ought not to do, and when we behave in ways that we ought not to behave, and when we are the perpetrators of violent crimes, people can't feel anything but sorry for us that the necessary adjustments haven't been made.

And it is becoming unthinkable to hold a person morally responsible for their behavior. We are responsible for their behavior in order, because we must provide the environmental conditioning and the fine-tuning that will make them behave.

And that's, I mean, I think that's a wonderfully sort of growing approach to the problems of humanity.

[8 : 22] I would say, on the whole, it has a long way to go. But even thinking that way is creating some enormous problems.

Now, that's the, what I consider the kind of necessary background from our time, from our times, to look at this strange and wonderful story of Jesus girding himself with a towel, setting aside his robe, and going about washing the disciples' feet.

And you will remember that last week we left off at that critical moment when Jesus is approaching Peter and our first verse today says of Jesus that he came to Simon Peter who said to him, Lord, are you going to wash my feet?

Well, the, the implication of that question is that I am not under any circumstances prepared prepared to let you do that to me.

That just is, that offends all my sense of dignity and order. That offends, I mean, it's an intimacy which I refuse to be, to submit to.

[9 : 51] It's a pattern of behavior which I can't acknowledge. I'm embarrassed at the thought of it. Others may be prepared to let you, but I certainly am not.

And so you get this, this Peter standing up, as it were, resisting what Jesus wants to do for him.

It's, you know, it's, Peter is like this. I mean, he's a, he's a wonderful, wonderful person and we should be extremely grateful that those who wrote the story of Peter were so candid about it, you know, that wonderful picture after the resurrection with the whole of world history about to be shaped by this man.

What does he say? I'm going fishing. That, gave authority to that kind of behavior, I guess. I, but it, it was that fishing trip which ended with catching nothing and, and being told to cast the net on the other side and, and Peter suddenly realizing who it was and throwing his clothes to one side, he jumps in the water, or maybe he doesn't, he just jumps into the water and heads for the shore.

wonderfully impulsive and almost always wrong. And, but, you see, I mean, that's so, that's, it seems to be the kind of person that, that is helpful.

[11 : 28] People who are, in a sense, impulsive on the one hand, and, and yet, and yet wrong because, you see, it was Jesus, it was Peter who made the, made the great statement that, thou art the Christ, the son of the living God.

And, and, in the, what I consider the immortal words of Richard Lucas who's commenting on this said, well if that's all you know, you don't know much.

Because, he then had to go on and tell about his death. And so he went and told Peter that, that after three days he would be betrayed and turned over to wicked men and they would crucify him and after three days he would rise again.

And he told, and Peter with his again brave impulsiveness says, that will never happen to you. And, Jesus says to Peter, get behind me Satan.

You know, that, I, the spontaneity of Peter and the fact that he's almost always wrong is a great comfort to me. Well, if you look at the next verse, I think you'll see, I think one of the really key things when it comes to our human existence.

[12 : 44] And this is why I told you, I read that stuff from the Globe and Mail or told you the story of the man with the two hats or the story of the book that's been written before God. You see, what this story does is to say to Peter and through Peter to us that you are a person of enormous significance and what you do with yourself is of eternal consequence.

You are a person in the fullest sense of the word and nobody is going to reduce you to a piece of machinery. You are responsible for your life and that's the dignity that belongs to you and that's the responsibility that belongs to you and that's what your life means.

because the people that are anxious to reduce us to machinery say that there's no significant difference between one person and another, that there is no ultimate purpose to human existence, that there is no destiny which awaits us.

They eliminate all that in terms of you're just a piece of machinery. Well, that's why when Jesus turns to Peter and says, Peter, just get this.

Now look at this sentence because it's a great, great sentence. Jesus says, you do not realize now what I am doing but later you will understand.

[14 : 16] Now what you have then is what you realize now and what you will ultimately understand. You got that two sort of foci if you want.

What you realize now, what later you will understand. and your immediate experience in contrast to your understanding.

Now, I mean, I take it that many of you are sitting there feeling virtuous and not without reason that having a hundred things that you might have done at this noon hour, you chose to come here.

Knowing the pain and suffering that would be involved for you, you still came here. So this is, you can look at this with some understanding. The present experience may not be that great, but the possible consequences are tremendous.

perhaps by noon tomorrow, some of the words of the Lord Jesus will have taken hold of your heart and your life will be changed.

[15 : 34] Right now, all you realize is that you're hungry and tired and have to get back to work. And Jesus says, what you realize now is probably deceptive.

What you will understand later, Peter, will be of great consequence. What you are experiencing now is that I am going to bow down on my knees before you and wash your feet.

And you're going to be humiliated by this. You are going to be subjected to an intimacy that you perhaps don't want to submit to. You don't want this experience.

But nevertheless, what you're going to realize now in this experience, one day you're going to understand the significance of it. And it's going to blow your mind to realize that I was there and that my feet were washed by the Lord Jesus.

And it's a, it's a, it's, and I, you see, I think that it's a, I think it's true of much of, I mean, this is, this is Jesus, this is in a sense one of the first realities of what it means to be a disciple of Christ.

[16 : 50] Christ, when you become a disciple of Christ, you get caught in doing the most humiliating things. I mean, I don't know if you've ever been invited to a prayer meeting.

Why would anyone ever go to one of those? I am. When life is so short and the potential for excitement is so great, why?

And of course, the same thing is true of church on Sunday morning. Why would you ever submit to that? Why would, you know, I mean, I know hundreds upon hundreds of proud people who with the same kind of indignation that Paul said, or that Peter had when he said, you're never going to wash my feet, have said to me, you're never going to find me in a Bible study.

I mean, it's, it offends everything I am and everything I believe in, my whole self-awareness would be offended by that. And so we, we understand what Jesus is saying that the present realized experience and the subsequent understanding have got to be locked together.

Now, I, I think that that's extremely profound as the basis of Christian discipleship. you know that, you, you, you have to submit now in faith that you will understand then.

[18 : 23] And that's totally contrary to our experience of life. Ernest Hemingway, I, I remember reading about him once that he said that, that the trust, the test of true love between a man and a woman is how you feel the morning after.

He says it's not the ecstasy of the experience, it's how you understand it later. And by and large, a lot of the frustration with the sensuality and hedonism of our life is that it's a commitment to now which brings acute depression afterwards.

It's submission to all the joy and ecstasy of our humanity right now and the deep depression that follows and the sense of failure and guilt and all those kinds of things.

And so Jesus says to him, Peter, what you're having to submit to now, one day you will understand and be extremely grateful for. And that's apparently the way Jesus deals with his disciples.

he says submit now and you will understand later on. And it's you see I think it's I think I think it's really the basis of addiction.

[19 : 49] Addiction says I got to have it right now. and how I'm going to feel in the morning or next week or next month or the rest of my life doesn't matter because I've got to have it right now.

I mean that's the alcoholic syndrome, isn't it? And drug everything works that way. You see the world reverses what Jesus teaches his disciples. He says, Peter, if you will submit to this now, you will understand later and you will be extremely grateful.

our world says, grab it now, doesn't matter what happens later. And that's, I mean, that seems kind of powerful to me.

So, Peter then says to him, you shall never wash my feet. And the commentator said that there's a certain expression hidden in the language there, which could be interpreted to mean, you will bloody well never wash my feet.

You know, that there was almost a curse involved in this. There is no way you're ever going to do that. And then to the wonderfully impulsive Peter, Jesus says, unless I wash your feet, you have no part with me, you have no share with me.

[21 : 15] you see, what has happened is that we got to break through that thing that I talked to you about last week, that the basis of our faith in Jesus Christ, the basis of being a disciple of Jesus Christ is that you are prepared to let him do for you what you can never do for yourself.

And, you see, that's our whole religious instinct, you see, turns that around and says it all depends on what I do for him. That's not, in fact, true.

It all depends on what he does for you and whether you will let him. And the great significance of Judas is to remind us all that we don't have to submit.

we can have our own agenda. And so, he said, Jesus says, unless I wash your feet, Peter, you have no part with me.

And what Jesus is saying is that the whole foundation of your life has got to be shifted. And that it's got to be shifted onto what I do for you.

[22 : 43] not what you do for me. And, you see, that's why I really personally agonize about this. And if I try and explain it to you, I suspect you won't understand.

But maybe I'll tell it to you now and you will understand it later. you see, the difficulty of the difficulty of life before God, the difficulty of our discussions about God, the problem we run into always is that we always start from where I am.

We start our discussion from where I am, who I am, what I feel, what I sense, what I believe, what I've experienced. And we don't get anywhere except frustrated.

And we, in a sense, maybe have some great sense of the union of all human beings because all human beings behave in the same way and start from themselves and can't understand God.

But you see, what Peter is being told here is, Peter, in order to understand, you must let me be who I am and you must let me do what I must do.

[24 : 10] You see how that ties in again to the story of Peter saying, this must never happen to you when Jesus said, I must go to the cross. Never.

You see, as far as Jesus was concerned, that was totally unacceptable. Get behind me, see. And here again, he says to Peter, unless I wash your feet, you have no part with me.

The life you're living, the world you're living in, the foundations you're living on, that's your work, that's you, that's centered on you. But unless you let me do for you what I must do for you, and ultimately you can't do for yourself, then you have no part with me.

And that's where the big shift comes in our lives, in the life of Christian discipleship. And so he says that that's what has to happen. you, the whole thing is there.

So Peter, again, with this wonderful impulsiveness, says, yes, okay, my head, my hands, my feet, everything. Well, Jesus says, no, no, no, no.

[25 : 23] Let's get this clear. you are washed by the word. Now, you are contaminated by the word.

I mean, when I read this, my wife tells me, I get up, I have this terrible addiction to reading the paper in the morning. And my wife always says, I just feel so filthy after I've read that paper.

But there is a very real sense in which it is our communion with Jesus Christ, our reading of his word, the work of his Holy Spirit in our lives, that cleanses us, that cleanses us, that it is our catharsis making of us clean.

And during the course of the day, we become contaminated by the gossip we get into, the discussions we get into, the things we watch on television, all sorts of things tend to contaminate us and to fill us often with greed or doubt or jealousy or fear, and we become totally contaminated by it.

And so having been cleansed, Jesus says, you need daily to have your feet washed. You need that daily cleansing as well. So Jesus is in a sense saying, at the basis of your life is the cleansing of my word, and as the basis of your daily life is the continual cleansing of the washing of your feet.

[27 : 00] So that Jesus has that double relationship to us. And if you look in John 15, 3, you say, you are cleansed by my word. You can look at it there.

But you see there's that cleansing, which a lot of people, a lot of commentators, likened to the cleansing of baptism and then the cleansing of confession and absolution on a kind of daily basis when we seek cleansing for what's happened that day because we are constantly being defiled by it.

So that's how he talks about this double relationship. Well, this is where the passage then ends up when Jesus says, you have, a person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet.

His whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you. For he knew who was going to betray him. And that was why he said, not everyone was clean.

That it's possible for us not to be clean. It's possible for the word not to have done it.

[28 : 12] You see, when people define what life is, they talk about the sacramental nature of life, which is the outward invisible sign of the inward and spiritual grace.

And for lots of people, they have all their lives been in touch with the outward invisible and never known the inward and spiritual. And it's very strange, you see, that when Jesus, in a kind of mysterious way, says to them, you are clean, but not all of you, it undoubtedly was possible for each of them to say, is he referring to me?

And it's probably a very healthy thing that the disciples of Jesus should ask that question, you know, not have the happy assurance that he's referring to somebody else, but to look at the possibility, is he referring to me?

and circumstances will show where your heart is. Confrontation with the person of the Lord Jesus will show you where your heart is.

And Judas, you can understand perhaps, as the person who never took his head off and never knew who was the king.

[29 : 41] Ultimately, that was the dilemma he ended up with. Let's pray. our God and Father, we thank you for the record of John's gospel, of the training of the disciples, of those who would be, who would take a share in the life of Jesus in the world.

So we pray that we, each one of us may allow you to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves, allow you to establish the foundation of our lives, because our own foundation is inadequate, allow you to heal us and cleanse us and sustain us by your grace and by your mercy at work in our lives, day in and day out.

And help us, our God, in whatever situation in which we find ourselves to know who you are and to know who we are.

Jesus, that I might know who you are and that I might know because of that who I am. We ask this in your holy name.

Amen.